

Starting a new life: the story of **Jenniflore**



Jenniflore and Bosco.

PHOTOGRAPHER: © SUNGKYU KIM

Jenniflore is 20 years old and is a single mother. Her son, Bosco, is two and a half years old. She lived with her sister before she was able to move into a new house that was constructed with materials provided through the Chemen Lavi Miyò (CLM) programme. It was thanks to her two sisters who agreed to give up parts of their adjacent areas that Jenniflore was able to build her home between their areas of land.

Having her own house in her home village in Mache Kana has not been an easy journey for Jenniflore. Since her mother's death at a young age, Jenniflore left Mache Kana to live with a cousin in Cité Soleil, an impoverished and harsh commune in Port-au-Prince. While living there, she faced daily violence and insecurity. House burglary was common. She suffered from unwanted attention from men in the

neighbourhood and became pregnant from sexual abuse. She received help from her brother-in-law, Jean-Marie (Beatrice's husband), who helped her come back to resettle in Mache Kana.

Jenniflore needed help to get back on her feet and overcome the traumatic event that she experienced in Port-au-Prince, and to support her newborn son, Bosco. She was eager to work and start a new life, but she had no means to start anything. She was still living at her sister and brother-in-law's house. Fortunately, in 2017, Jenniflore met with some people who came to her village enquiring about their living conditions and difficulties in making a living. Jenniflore and her sisters, Beatrice and Vanessa, stated their case, and after several interviews and home visits, were accepted onto the CLM programme.

Since joining the programme, she has found a new partner, Dieudonné. Dieudonné and Jenniflore are expecting their first child, and Dieudonné is planning to move in after the birth.

Participation in the CLM programme

When the CLM case manager explained to her about the economic activities that she could receive help with, Jenniflore chose livestock as her main activity. Jenniflore wanted to get involved in commercial trading, but because she was still nursing Bosco, she was unable to leave home for too long. She takes livestock rearing seriously and considers it to be full-time work. She moves her goats three times a day in search of better grazing areas. With the initial endowment of a pig and two goats, she has increased the numbers to five chickens, one turkey, one pig, and four goats. She is proud of her fast-growing results and is eager to achieve more.

Jenniflore participates in two savings groups to which she contributes every week. The money that she received and saved from the cash transfer was crucial in starting and investing in her trading business. She sells cigarettes, biscuits, and sweets at cockfighting arenas (*gaga*) and churches on Thursday, Saturday, and Sunday. If she cannot go, then her partner, Dieudonné or her aunt go and sell instead.

Jenniflore believes that with her livestock, the money that she earns through trading, and the savings, she will be able to buy a cow. Jenniflore explained: 'The animals are important because, tomorrow, if I took good care

of them, they will help me to move forward... in the future, the goats might help me buy a cow.' Jenniflore and her sisters' families buy and drink milk regularly, so having a family cow will save money and increase household dairy consumption. Jenniflore is aware that rearing a cow is going to be much more demanding than goats and other smaller animals. She expects that closer collaboration and working with Dieudonné will be necessary for taking care of a cow.

Jenniflore appreciates the CLM training, especially the message about healthy and nutritious diets for children. When she first joined the programme, the case manager noticed that one-year-old Bosco had symptoms of malnutrition. Jenniflore followed the prescribed diet which is rich in protein and fibre, and this helped Bosco to regain his normal weight rapidly. Jenniflore was glad that she was able to treat Bosco at the earlier stage of malnutrition.

Positive or negative effects on her children

When Jenniflore joined the programme, she did not have any land to build her house. Her sisters, Vanessa and Beatrice, who lived side-by-side, decided to give parts of their adjacent land for Jenniflore to build a house. Having a place of her own and a safe space for Bosco to play and run around in gave Jenniflore a sense of stability and comfort.

Moreover, living close to her sisters provides benefits from an economy of scale in time and labour. For instance, she shares some of the household chores with her sisters, such as taking turns to cook for the families and doing laundry collectively. There is always a surplus of food between the three families.

Beatrice and her husband Jean-Marie's 11-year-old daughter Madeleine often helps Jenniflore with babysitting when she is away. Madeleine cooks very well, and she usually takes charge of looking after younger siblings including Bosco. Jenniflore trusts her niece completely, and she started to leave Bosco with Madeleine soon after Bosco stopped exclusive breastfeeding. Jenniflore also takes care of her sisters' children when they need her help.

Jenniflore remarked on the change in time spent interacting with Bosco since she joined the CLM programme. With growing opportunities for work, she has less time to spend with her son, but she is pragmatic about the situation. 'I spend less time with him, so I can go and sell things. I will leave him with



Heifer.

PHOTOGRAPHER: © SUNGKYU KIM

other people... but that's not a problem because what I am doing will benefit the child.'

However, there is one thing that worries Jenniflore regarding the children in the neighbourhood. Jenniflore worries that the threats from wandering evil spirits could compromise the children's safety and security. While adults could be a target, children and pregnant women are often considered 'weaker' and more vulnerable. Therefore, they are more likely to be targeted by a curse or jinx. Jenniflore is Christian and goes to church every week.

Challenges

Living in close proximity to her sisters and extended families provides Jenniflore with plenty of support in child-caring and supervision. However, she has some reservations regarding the traditional Vodou practices that her brother-in-law does at his home. Her brother-in-law is a local *ougan* [priest]. While she does not object to herbal medicines and benign healing practices, she is not keen on hearing the

magic spells, and drum-beating surrounding Vodou rituals. Since she lives right beside her sister and brother-in-law's place, it is not possible for her to ignore these activities, so she stays in her house when the rituals take place.

Similarly, there is a strong local and family influence of traditional health-seeking practices. There is a clear distinction in treatment options available, which are (1) bio-medical, (2) herbal, and (3) spiritual faith-healing. These three practices coexist in the area. Jenniflore usually consults medical doctors first, but if the symptoms do not abate or they are deemed 'spiritually caused', then she would resort to traditional herbal remedies. She has never asked for help from a spiritual faith-healer.

Jenniflore's partner, Dieudonné helps her with selling merchandise and brings milk for Bosco sometimes, but Jenniflore takes household matters upon herself and is mostly self-reliant. Jenniflore is cautious and wants a stable and committed relationship that will help her progress more rapidly in the future.



Vodoun temple.

PHOTOGRAPHER: © SUNGKYU KIM

Hopes and aspirations for the future

With the second child soon to be born, Jenniflore expects that Dieudonné will show a greater commitment and contribution to child-caring and support. She believes that together, they could manage greater things such as rearing a cow.

After working successfully through the CLM activities and training, Jenniflore feels capable and able to take good care of her children. Her extended families will continue to support her as they are doing now. If going out afar to do business is not possible, then she will set up a shop from home. For example, she could sell non-food items such as soap and laundry detergents.

Jenniflore is optimistic and confident that she will continue to prosper in her current economic activities. Jenniflore is instantly motivated whenever she remembers how she used to stay at home having nothing to do, before joining the CLM programme. Jenniflore works relentlessly even when the sales at the market are disappointing. Jenniflore's case manager commended her highly because of her strong work ethic. As the local proverb goes, '*pousie pie pi bon kechita nan kay*' – 'it is better to go out and get the feet dusty than sit idly at home'.



This case study was written by **SungKyu Kim** and **Keetie Roelen**. The research was funded by the British Academy's Early Childhood Development Programme and W.K. Kellogg Foundation.

The opinions expressed are those of the authors and do not necessarily reflect the views of IDS, the British Academy or W.K. Kellogg Foundation.

© Institute of Development Studies 2019



This is an Open Access case study distributed under the terms of the Creative Commons Attribution 4.0 International licence (CC BY), which permits unrestricted use, distribution, and reproduction in any medium, provided the original authors and source are credited and any modifications or adaptations are indicated. <http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/legalcode>

IDS is a charitable company limited by guarantee and registered in England (No 877338).

Institute of Development Studies, Brighton BN1 9RE UK

T +44 (0) 1273 606261 E ids@ids.ac.uk W www.ids.ac.uk twitter.com/IDS_UK facebook.com/idsuk